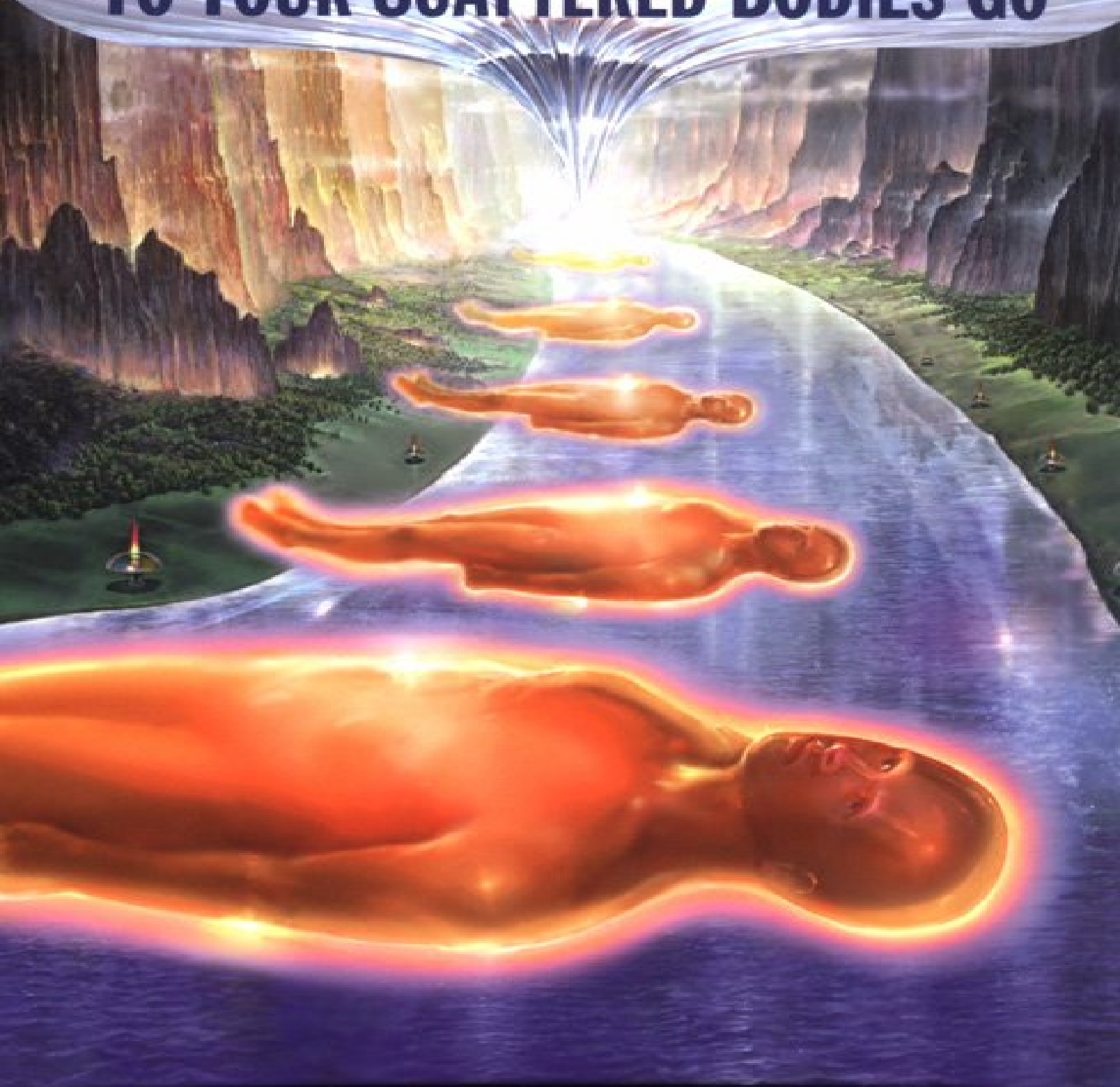


WINNER OF THE HUGO AWARD

PHILIP JOSÉ FARMER

BOOK 1 OF THE LEGENDARY RIVERWORLD SAGA

TO YOUR SCATTERED BODIES GO



To Your Scattered Bodies Go

by

Philip Jose Farmer

Book 1 of the Riverworld Series

First published in 1971

Hugo Award winner, Locus Award nominee, 1972

1

His wife had held him in her arms as if she could keep death away from him.

He had cried out, "My God, I am a dead man!" The door to the room had opened, and he had seen a giant, black, one-humped camel outside and had heard the tinkle of the bells on its harness as the hot desert wind touched them. Then a huge black face topped by a great black-turban had appeared in the doorway. The black eunuch had come in through the door, moving like a cloud, with a gigantic scimitar in his hand. Death, the Destroyer of Delights and the Sunderer of Society, had arrived at last.

Blackness. Nothingness. He did not even know that his heart had given out forever. Nothingness.

Then his eyes opened. His heart was beating strongly. He was strong, very strong! All the pain of the gout in his feet, the agony in his liver, the torture in his heart, all were gone.

It was so quiet he could hear the blood moving in his head. He was alone in a world of soundlessness.

A bright light of equal intensity was everywhere. He could see, yet he did not understand what he was seeing. What were these things above, beside, below him? Where was he? He tried to sit up and felt, numbly, a panic. There was nothing to sit up upon because he was hanging in nothingness. The attempt sent him forward and over, very slowly, as if he were in a bath of thin treacle. A foot from his fingertips was a rod of bright red metal. The rod came from above, from infinity,—and went on down to infinity. He tried to grasp it because it was the nearest solid object, but something invisible was resisting him. It was as if lines of some force were pushing against him, repelling him.

Slowly, he turned over in a somersault. Then the resistance halted him with his fingertips about six inches from the rod. He straightened his body out

and moved forward a fraction of an inch. At the same time, his body began to rotate on its longitudinal axis. He sucked in air with a loud sawing noise. Though he knew no hold existed for him, he could not help flailing his arms in panic to try to seize onto something.

He was face "down", (or was it up?) Whatever the direction, it was opposite to that toward which he had been looking when he had awakened. Not that this mattered. "Above" him and "below" him the view was the same. He was suspended in space, kept from falling by an invisible and unfelt cocoon. Six feet "below" him was the body of a woman with a very pale skin. She was naked and completely hairless. She seemed to be asleep: Her eyes were closed, and her breasts rose and fell gently. Her legs were together and straight out and her arms were by her side. She turned slowly like a chicken on a spit.

The same force that was rotating her was also rotating him. He spun slowly away from her, saw other naked and hairless bodies, men, women, and children, opposite him in silent spinning rows. Above him was the rotating naked and hairless body of a Negro.

He lowered his head so that he could see along his own body. He was naked and hairless, too. His skin was smooth, and the muscles of his belly were ridged, and his thighs were packed with strong young muscles. The veins that had stood out like blue mole-ridges were gone. He no longer had the body of the enfeebled and sick sixty-nine-year-old man who had been dying only a moment ago. And the hundred or so scars were gone.

He realized then that there were no old men or women among the bodies surrounding him. All seemed to be about twenty-five years old, though it was difficult to determine the exact age, since the hairless heads and pubes made them seem older and younger at the same time.

He had boasted that he knew no fear. Now fear ripped away the cry forming in his throat. His fear pressed down on him and squeezed the new life from him. He had been stunned at first because he was still living. Then his position in space and the arrangement of his new environment had frozen his senses. He was seeing and feeling through a thick semi-opaque window.

After a few seconds something snapped inside him. He could almost hear it, as if a window had suddenly been raised.

The world took a shape which he could grasp, though he could not comprehend it. Above him, on both sides, below him, as far as he could see, bodies floated. They were arranged in vertical and horizontal rows. The up-and-down ranks were separated by red rods, slender as broomsticks, one of which was twelve inches from the feet of the sleepers and the other twelve inches from their heads. Each body was spaced about six feet from the body above and below and on each side.

The rods came up from an abyss without bottom and soared into an abyss without ceiling. That grayness into which the rods and the bodies, up and down, right and left, disappeared was neither the sky nor the earth. There was nothing in the distance except the lackluster of infinity.

On one side was a dark man with Tuscan features. On his other side was an Asiatic Indian and beyond her a large Nordic looking man. Not until the third revolution was he able to determine what was so odd about the man. The right arm, from a point just below the elbow, was red. It seemed to lack the outer layer of skin.

A few seconds later, several rows away, he saw a male adult body lacking the skin and all the muscles of the face.

There were other bodies that were not quite complete. Fat away, glimpsed unclearly, was a skeleton and a jumble of organs inside it.

He continued turning and observing while his heart slammed against his chest with terror. By then he understood that he was in some colossal chamber and that the metal rods were radiating some force that somehow supported and revolved millions—maybe billions—of human beings.

Where was this place? Certainly, it was not the city of Trieste of the Austro-Hungarian Empire of 1890.

It was like no hell or heaven of which he had ever heard or read, and he had thought that he was acquainted with every theory of the afterlife.

He had died. Now he was alive. He had scoffed all his life at a life-after-death. For once, he could not deny that he had been wrong. But there was no one present to say, "I told you so, you damned infidel!" Of all the millions, he alone was awake.

As he turned at an estimated rate of one complete revolution per ten seconds, he saw something else that caused him to gasp with amazement. Five rows away was a body that seemed, at first glance, to be human. But no member of Homo sapiens had three fingers and a thumb on each hand and four toes on each foot nor a nose and thin black leathery lips like a dog's. Nor with many small knobs. Nor ears with such strange convolutions.

Terror faded away. His heart quit beating so swiftly, though it did not return to normal His brain unfroze. He must get out of this situation where he was as helpless as a hog on a turnspit. He would get to somebody who could tell him what he was doing here, how he had come here, why he was here.

To decide was to act.

He drew up his legs and kicked and found that the action, the reaction, rather, drove him forward a half-inch. Again, he kicked and moved against the resistance. But, as he paused, he was slowly moved back toward his original location. And his legs and arms were gently pushed toward their original rigid position.

In a frenzy, kicking his legs and moving his arms in a swimmer's breaststroke, he managed to fight toward the rod. The closer he got to it, the stronger the web of force became. He did not give up. If he did, he would be back where he had been and without enough strength to begin fighting again. It was not his nature to give up until all his strength had been expended.

He was breathing hoarsely, his body was coated with sweat, his arms and legs moved as if in a thick jelly, and his progress was imperceptible. Then, the fingertips of his left hand touched the rod. It felt warm and hard.

Suddenly, he knew which way was "down." He fell.

The touch had broken the spell. The webs of air around him snapped soundlessly, and he was plunging.

He was close enough to the rod to seize it with one hand. The sudden checking of his fall brought his hip up against the rod with a painful impact. The skin of his hand burned as he slid down the rod, and then his other hand clutched the rod, and he had stopped. In front of him, on the other side of the rod, the bodies had started to fall. They descended with the velocity of a falling body on Earth, and each maintained its stretched-out position and the original distance between the body above and below. They even continued to revolve.

It was then that the puffs of air on his naked sweating back made him twist around on the rod. Behind him, in the vertical row of bodies that he had just occupied, the sleepers were also falling. One after the other, as if methodically dropped through trapdoor spinning slowly, they hurtled by him. Their heads hit him by a few inches. He was fortunate not to have been knocked off the rod and sent plunging into the abyss along with them.

In stately procession, they fell. Body after body shooting down on both sides of the rod, while the other rows of millions upon millions slept on.

For a while, he stared. Then he began counting bodies; he had always been a devoted enumerator. But when he had counted 3,001, he quit. After that he gazed at the cataract of flesh. How far up, how immeasurably far up, were they stacked? And how far down could they fall? Unwittingly, he had precipitated them when his touch had disrupted the force emanating from the rod.

He could not climb up the rod, but he could climb down it. He began to let himself down, and then he looked upward and he forgot about the bodies hurtling by him. Somewhere overhead, a humming was overriding the whooshing sound of the falling bodies.

A narrow craft, of some bright green substance and shad like a canoe, was sinking between the column of the fallers and the neighboring column of suspended. The aerial canoe had no visible means of support, he thought, and it was a measure of his terror that he did not even think about his pun.

No visible means of support. Like a magical vessel out of *The Thousand and One Nights*.

A face appeared over the edge of the vessel. The craft stopped, and the humming noise ceased. Another face was by the first. Both had long, dark, and straight hair. Presently, the faces withdrew, the humming was renewed, and the canoe again descended toward him. When it was about five feet above him it halted. There was a single small symbol on the green bow: a white spiral that exploded to the right. One of the canoe's occupants spoke in a language with many vowels and a distinct and frequently recurring glottal stop. It sounded like Polynesian. Abruptly, the invisible cocoon around him reasserted itself. The falling bodies began to slow in their rate of descent and then stopped. The man on the rod felt the retaining force close in on him and lift him up. Though he clung desperately to the rod, his legs were moved up and then away and his body followed it. Soon he was looking downward. His hands were torn loose; he felt as if his grip on life, on sanity, on the world, had also been torn away. He began to drift upward and to revolve. He went by the aerial canoe and rose above it. The two men in the canoe were naked, dark-skinned as Yemenite Arabs, and handsome. Their features were Nordic, resembling these of some Icelanders he had known.

One of them lifted a hand which held a pencil-sized metal object. The man sighted along it as if he were going to shoot something from it.

The man fisting in the air shouted with rage and hate and frustration and flailed his arms to swim toward the machine.

"I'll kill!" he screamed. "Kill! Kill!" Oblivion came again.

2

God was standing over him as he lay on the grass by the waters and the weeping willows. He lay wide-eyed and as weak as a baby just born. God was poking him in the ribs with the end of an iron cane. God was a tall man of middle age. He had a long black forked beard, and He was wearing the Sunday best of an English gentleman of the 53rd year of Queen Victoria's reign.

"You're late," God said. "Long past due for the payment of your debt, you know."

"What debt?" Richard Francis Burton said. He passed his fingertips over his ribs to make sure that all were still there.

"You owe me for the flesh," replied God, poking him again with the cane. "Not to mention the spirit. You owe for the flesh and the spirit, which are one and the same thing." Burton struggled to get up onto his feet. Nobody, not every God, was going to punch Richard Burton in the ribs and get away without a battle.

God, ignoring the futile efforts, pulled a large gold watch from His vest pocket, unsnapped its heavy encrusted gold lid, looked at the hands, and said, "Long past due." God held out His other hand, its palm turned up.

"Pay up, sir. Otherwise, I'll be forced to foreclose."

"Foreclose on what? Darkness fell. God began to dissolve into the darkness. It was then that Burton saw that God resembled himself. He had the same black straight hair, the same Arabic face with the dark stabbing eyes, high cheekbones, heavy lips, and the thrust-out, reply cleft chin. The same long deep scars, witnesses of the Somali javelin which pierced his jaws in that fight at Berbers, were on His cheeks. His hands and feet were small, contrasting with His broad shoulders and massive chest, and he had the long thick moustachios and the long forked beard that had caused the Bedouin to name Burton "the Father of Moustachios."